The Book of Joshua: Background Information

The Book of Joshua is the story of a turning point, a threshold. It contains God’s charge and promise for a new nation. Slavery is behind them; freedom and rest is before them. God has formed a nation, Israel, from a people who were in slavery for hundreds of years in a pagan culture filled with seductive idol worship and servitude to a cruel tyrant, Pharaoh—a symbol of Satan who controls those in bondage to him. To understand the significance of these people crossing the border into a land which the Lord first promised hundreds of years before to their ancestor Abraham, one must know the history in between. Abraham’s son Isaac inherited the covenant promise of God that his seed would inherit a Promised Land, become a great nation, and would bless the whole earth. Isaac passed this blessing on to his son Jacob (his name became Israel), who then had twelve sons, the first ancestors of the twelve tribes of Israel. A famine brought these men and their families to Egypt where they flourished under the protection of the Pharaoh, who had promoted one of the brothers—Joseph—to govern all Egypt. God’s providence insured the survival and growth of a people who were very important to God’s plan for the earth. A new pharaoh eventually changed Israel’s favored position in Egypt to one of cruel slavery.

God raised up Moses to deliver His covenant people. In order to “bless the whole earth,” which was always God’s purpose, He needed to raise up a nation who could be “His people.” That means they would serve Him, keep His commandment and serve no other Gods. This, as we will see from the Bible story, is easier said than done. Moses led them out of Egypt on Passover night, parted the Red Sea and delivered them out of slavery. Most know they ended up wandering 40 years, but might not know why. A few months after leaving Egypt they were on the border of Canaan with an opportunity to enter their new homeland! The Israelites knew that this “Promised Land” was “a land inhabited by Amorites, Jebusites, Hittites” etc. Clearly the Promised Land was not a place of plowed lots ready for builders. No—the Promised Land was occupied; it had to be conquered. So Moses sent scouts—one spy from each of the 12 tribes—to learn what it would take to conquer it. The spies marveled at its fruitfulness. They brought back grape clusters on long poles (which is Israel’s logo today), and reported “a land of milk and honey.” But they also brought back bad news (an “evil report”) that the land was full of Anakim (giants) who were too powerful to overcome. Ten scouts said they could not take the Promised Land and urged the people to return to Egypt. Only two had faith that God would ensure victory: Joshua and Caleb. The negative spirit of the ten prevailed and the people were afraid to try. So God declared they would wander for 40 years until the unbelieving generation died off. (Numbers 13,14) When Moses died the Lord called Joshua, one of the faithful scouts, to lead the mission of entering, claiming and conquering the land they had been promised by God. The book of Joshua begins just as they enter the land. The first half of the book (chapters 1-12) tells of conquering the Promised Land, and the second half (chapters 13-24) tells of dividing and inheriting the land. The book is replete with characters and events that carry lessons that apply to us today. The theme of Joshua is that God will fight our battles for us if we are living as covenant people, in other words, if we live to fulfill His vision and plan, rather than our own. When that is our goal, if we will be courageous, trust His word and and keep the commandments, victory is certain.
Lesson 1: OT: Joshua & Judges

Reading 1: Read Joshua Chapter 1
1. In the first 7 verses of Joshua 1, what phrases show continuity with the way God dealt with His people in the past? In other words, what are the clues that the story in Joshua is a direct link and continuation of the story of Exodus?

2. Joshua had been at Moses’ side for 40 years. Verses 2-9 are God’s “charge” to Joshua as he took over leadership?
   a. What was God going to do for the nation of Israel and why?

   b. What blessings were promised Joshua that would enable him to lead?

   c. What did Joshua have to do in order to be a successful leader?

   d. What attitudes and thoughts were to be in Joshua’s mind and heart?

   e. PERSONAL: Is there a time when you faced a daunting task but were able to take courage from a promise you received that the Lord was going to be with you every step of the way?

3. Write the phrase from verse 8 that corresponds to the three ways that Joshua was to use scripture as his strength.
   1 - Talk about it:
   2 - Think about it:
   3 - Do it (Obey it):
4. Why do you think keeping scripture at the center of one’s life in this way is a recipe for success in life?
   b. Can you share a way that you have found to “meditate” on the word of the Lord “day and night” or, i.e., throughout the day?

   c. How would reading the scriptures daily, help LDS women be “strong and of good courage”?

5. a. Look at map #3 at the back of the Bible, after the Bible dictionary. Which two and a half tribes inherited their portion of land on the east side of the Jordan River right away? (Map 5 if you have the older version of LDS maps)

   b. Why could they not “rest” until their brethren had been settled? Why can’t we?

Reading 2: Read Joshua 2
6. What evidence do you find that Rahab the harlot of Jericho had real faith in Israel’s God? List everything she said and did that showed her faith.
7.  a. **CHALLENGE QUESTION:** What similarities do you see between what Rahab does to be “passed over” by the Israelite army and what the children of Israel did on the night of the first Passover? (See Ex. 12:2-23)

   b. What do you think the scarlet cord symbolizes and why? Try to find a scripture (anywhere) that backs up your idea.

8. Read Hebrews 11:30,31. After the fall of Jericho Rahab (a.k.a-Rachab) marries one of the princes of the tribe of Judah. She is listed as an ancestor in the Savior’s line. (See Matt. 1:5) How do you think a prostitute could have such an honored position?

**Reading 3: Joshua 3 and Joshua 4**

9. Briefly describe the Ark of the Covenant and its contents. (See B.D.)

10. When the priests carried the Ark in front of the people, why do you think the people were required to keep far away from it? (2000 cubits or 3000 feet)

11. The story of entering the Promised Land has many similarities to Moses leading the people out of Egypt. This was purposeful on God’s part. He wanted to show the people 3 great changeless factors. How did he show that:
   1. They will still be led by God’s Book—His written word.
   2. They will still be led by a mighty prophet/leader.
   3. The power of Almighty God is still with them.

12. Why does God perform the miracle of parting the Jordan River to get the Israelites into their new country? (See also chp. 1:5 and 5:1) Give the reasons given in the text and any others that you think might apply.

13. a. What was the purpose of the memorial of 12 large stones from the riverbed? Cite verse.

   b. Why would this be important to the nation as a whole?

   c. How can you “memorialize” what God has done for you, and why should you?